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ABSTRACT

The Alternative Freshman Year (AFY) program instituted at a community college extension of an eastern university can serve as a model for other developmental education programs. The program, now in its fourth year, helps to upgrade the language and math skills of academically and emotionally unprepared students. Students are admitted to the program only if they are in a degree program and exhibit motivation for learning in a pre-enrollment interview. During the fall semester AFY offers two sections each of math and language for non-credit, and during the second semester the classes remain relatively intact when the courses become credit bearing. The initial focus in language sections is on study skills including learning styles, motivation, study habits, note-taking, SQ3R, and test-taking. Students begin journal writing from day one and practice reading skills, the writing process, and word processing. Students also receive additional support in a weekly one-hour lab which supplements classroom instruction and provides them an opportunity to experiment with some strategies and skills in a non-threatening environment. Weekly conferences with students are also held outside of class with each student to monitor individual progress. Finally, counselors address each class four or five times each semester to provide "survival tips," and former AFY students serve as mentors and class-link tutors by leading essay workshops and presenting role models of success. (KEH)

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THE AFY PROGRAM AT UNHM: REACHING OUT TO UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS

Margaret Pobywajlo
Paper presented at NERC Conference
October 14, 1989

As college educators, we are often reminded of increasing costs and decreasing student populations. We are further reminded of the poor reading, writing, and math skills of entering Freshmen. The majority of colleges and universities have responded to these trends with programs that enable more students to attend the colleges and at the same time, seek to improve reading, writing, and math skills. For example, CAMPUS TRENDS 1987, published by the American Council on Education, reported that 42% of the colleges surveyed completed curriculum review, and of these 74% placed greater emphasis on writing, while 53% introduced changes focused on other competencies like communication and reading. Almost all colleges and universities have special programs designed to increase student retention.

UNHM - as the community college extension of UNH - has been challenged to provide the community with increased access to higher education. In response, UNHM has reached out to underprepared students with the Alternative Freshman Year program (AFY). I believe our AFY program can serve as a model for other developmental education programs.

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Sharyn Lowenstein, the Director of our Learning Center, developed and implemented AFY in 1986. She was charged with creating a program which would open the doors to capable but unprepared students by upgrading their language and math skills. Ultimately, Sharyn's plan emerged as a one semester non-credit

course for degree students followed by the credit course in English and/or math. Admissions referred some students to Sharyn for screening, and Sharyn assessed their math, reading and writing skills by administering tests. Students were counseled into AFY if their test results were substandard or if they lacked the self-confidence to take English 401. Sharyn also evaluated the students' motivation during the interview; AFY students must be highly motivated. Admission to the AFY degree program continues to follow these guidelines with a few exceptions which I will note later.

The AFY program, now under the directorship of Jean Zipke, is in its fourth year. UNHM offers two sections of AFY Language and two sections of AFY math during the Fall semester. The classes stay relatively intact when the courses become credit bearing during the second semester, although a few students may move to the other 401(AFY) section and a few drop out.

Who is the AFY student? So far we have had a fairly equal number of males and females; the ages have ranged from 18 to 45. Although only degree students were initially allowed to take AFY classes, we now counsel DCE students into AFY classes if they are motivated but need the extra preparation. These students later apply to be AFY degree students, and with a few exceptions, they are granted admission. While there are marked differences among the students, they share some common characteristics.

First of all, AFY students are judged to be "high risk" but capable of completing the program. Jean and Sharyn, along with Admissions, look at the students' high school records, entrance test scores (or SAT's), and recommendations. For admission to AFY,

however, the interview is more important than past records because the students' lack of motivation could keep them out of AFY (and possibly out of the university.)

Students who interview for AFY are frequently dissatisfied with their current jobs and/or the direction their lives have taken to date. Many have been our of school for two or more years. All of them are in a period of transition, seeking to make changes in their lives and eager to learn. So, if the students are capable and motivated, why then are they "high risk"? ALL AFY STUDENTS ARE UNPREPARED FOR COLLEGE:ACADEMICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND/OR CULTURALLY.

Many AFY students are academically unprepared because they made poor choices in the past. For example, they may have missed a lot of school, or they didn't complete assignments and received poor grades; some opted for "easy" courses instead of college prep or chose the social scene over the academic one. They may have even dropped out of school. As a result of making poor choices, they have poor study skills and significant gaps in their academic backgrounds. So, most AFY students do not meet Durham's standards.

A few AFY students are coded learning disabled. However, AFY is NOT a program specifically for L.D. students. Two of my current students are "coded", but I have two more who have very special learning problemes that would not come under any official coding.

A few AFY students come with good skills, but they are emotionally unprepared for college. They lack confidence in their skills and sometimes suffer a lack of self-esteem. Returning adult

students often fall into this category; other students are emotionally unprepared because they are burdened with personal problems which have prevented them from succeeding. Also, a history of chemical abuse and/or disjointed home lives is not uncommon among AFY students.

Almost all AFY students are culturally unprepared for college. They are naive about the workload, the bureaucratic paperwork, time management; as Paul Connolly says, they do not know the "language of the academy".(speech to NEWCA participants) Many of our students are first generation college students who have too little support for their "college try".

Another common characteristic is that all of our AFY students work 15 or more hours/week, and many hold full time jobs while juggling work, home, and school. All of the above contribute to the profile of a non-traditional student who chooses AFY. So far my comments have applied to both math and language AFY students. From this point on, I am going to restrict my comments to the language portion of the program.

To meet the academic needs of AFY students, the AFY program includes the following:

- 4 contact hours/week; 3 hours in English class and 1 hour/week in a lab conducted by the Director of the Learning Center.
- weekly conferences
- support from the academic counseling office
- tutoring, especially class link tutors.

As the AFY Language instructor, I teach study skills, reading

skills, and the writing process -- a tall order for one semester. Although we begin reading and writing immediately, I focus on study skills for the first six weeks. Using Eric Jensen's STUDENT SUCCESS SECRETS and whatever other helpful sources I can put my hands on, I introduce learning styles, motivation, study habits, notetaking, SQ3R, and testtaking. Students begin Journal writing on day 1, but the more formal writing is delayed a few weeks. Our current writing textbook is Don Knefl's WRITING AND LIFE, and our reader is David Cavitch's LIFE STUDIES; we also require our students to buy Diana Hacker's RULES FOR WRITERS. AFY students use these texts for two semesters - both for the non-credit semester and the credit-bearing Engish 401.

I have added a word processing component to my AFY section. I believe the computer is an invaluable tool for all writing students, but especially for learning disabled students. I require frequent and numerous revisions which are much less tedious and less discouraging to do with word processing. I also introduce William Wresch's writing software WRITERS' HELPER STAGE II because these students are often unfamiliar with pre-writing and revising. The software supports my classroom efforts to teach the writing process.

Students receive additional support in the weekly one-hour lab which provides them an opportunity to experiement with some strategies and skills in a non-threatening environment. Lab activities supplement classroom instruction. For example, after I introduce study habits, Sharyn focuses on concentration, and when I work on test taking strategies, Sharyn introduces mnemonics and

other memory devices. While I work on making notes from textbooks, she introduces notetaking from lectures.

Although the lab traditionally is run only during the non-credit portion of the program, I asked Sharyn to continue the lab last year through English 401. Students liked the additional point of view, the change of instructors and teaching styles. Besides, they quickly learn in lab that "Here's another person who cares".

Caring is more than a "buzz word" in the AFY program. We conference weekly outside of class with each student about his/her classwork, and as academic advisors, we closely monitor progress in all his/her classes. Our caring "network" includes the academic counselors who are also available to our students. To ensure the students recognize the counselors as resources, we invite them to address our classes four or five times during the Fall semester and at least twice during the spring semester. The counselors provide "survival tips", untangle students handbooks, rules and paperwork, and offer support in many ways.

Finally, we have the support of the Learning Center tutors. I'm fortunate to have a former AFY student as my class-link tutor. Jen workshops with students on their essays in class, leads some discussions, and sometimes she present mini-modules on specific skills. Of course, the obvious benefit of Jen's presence is that she's a great role mdoel and mentor for my current class.

So far, so good - but something's still lacking... adequate staffing. We do NOT have a personal counselor on campus, and that is a serious gap in our program. As I mentioned before, AFY students often come from troubled backgrounds, and they need to

talk to skilled counselors. Although Jean, Sharyn, the math teachers, and I all do a lot of LISTENING, we are not equipped to handle the serious problems of these students. The second staff person we are missing is a learning disabilities specialist. We should have available someone who can administer a variety of tests to help us diagnose disabilities, to formulate an educational plan for the l.d. students, to advocate for the l.d. students in their other classes, and to support their efforts.

Strangely enough the other missing element is ADVERTISING. We have not yet convinced the administration that AFY can be marketed without sacrificing the college's repuration or standards. We would like to target returning adult students and let them know that having a poor academic background need not prevent them from getting a college education if they want it bad enough. To date, we have been dependent on a small blurb in the college bulletin, Admissions' referrals, and on word of mouth. AFY has much potential for growth if we can "spread the word".